

Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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“Tattoo or Not Tattoo? That’s the Needling Question”

I think it was the Village People who said that “macho” is only skin deep. Or maybe it was Michael Jackson. Well, 10:30 on a cloudy Saturday morning found me outside Rick’s Tattoo Parlor looking for macho in all the superficial places.

Three of us arrived at the door at about the same time. I eyed the other two with an “I was here before you so don’t even think of jumping in front of me” look. One was a skinny chain-smoking auto mechanic. He barely made it up five stairs without coughing so I knew I could take him if I had to. The other was a fifty-year-old mother who kept glancing over her shoulder as if she’d been followed by her bible study group. She was more of a challenge since she out-massed me by about 20 pounds of water weight. But she *was* a girl.

Rick, looking like an unmade bed, finally showed up. He led us into the waiting room and asked who was first. Before I could speak, the mechanic blurted out that he was first, and by the way needed to get back to work; that I was second; and that this very nice “young lady” was last. He gave her a full three-tooth grin.

Technically, my car was first in the lot but I had dozed off when the mechanic drove up and wheezed his way in front of me. Even though I outweighed him by 75 pounds, I certainly didn’t want to make him late for work. I’m pretty sure getting a tattoo is not an “excused” absence.....unless you work at Bud’s Leather and Piercing Outlet.

The waiting room décor was a cross between early rustic Amish and neglected contemporary Redneckian. Worn couches and skewed chairs littered the room while tables with stacks of tattoo photographs depicting a variety of decorated body parts were scattered about. Above the cash register, a sign read, “If it didn’t hurt a little, every wimp would have one.”

Aarrgh, I thought.

The walls were crowded with samples of hearts, roses, barbed wire, marijuana leaves (I recognized them from photos I saw in National Geographic), Satan and a sofa-size image of the Last Supper drawn with detail that would rival the Sistine Chapel.

As I wandered about, a pair of twenty-year-old women came in. They browsed the images. One giggled loudly and said, “Like I would get that. It’s like soooo low class.”

I wanted to say, "Perhaps I could get you a Chardonnay while you wait.....or a prosciutto and melon wrap. NOT! WE'RE IN A FLIPPIN' TATOO PARLOR, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!"

A young man, who came in after the sorority sisters, showed me the most elaborate unfinished tattoo I had ever seen. On the top quarter of his back were a mountain range, a waterfall and a river flowing into a scenic wooded area. I was marveling at his Sistine Forest when he explained that he could only tolerate a quarter at a time because of the pain. I bowed to his Macho Highness.

Although the mother was getting a rose as her first tattoo, she had recently forbidden her eighteen-year-old daughter from getting one. I was thinking, *Guess what mom? Not only did your daughter get one anyway, it's placed in a location that's hidden by a bikini. So, nice try.*

Finally, Mr. Goodwrench emerged and proudly showed us the naked woman on his left arm which matched the naked woman on the right. Everyone cheered. Rick admonished him to keep the new tattoo clean. The mechanic promised he would not remove the bandage when he went back to work like he did with his first tattoo. Apparently, the infection caused by splattered gas and oil took months to heal and the scar gave his naked woman a permanent goiter on one side of her head.

At last I was ushered into the tattoo chair. I felt as if I was joining a host of macho men who, for generations, withstood the temporary pain of a needle to experience the permanent glory of skin art. And it did hurt a little but I took it like a man (or in some cases, a fifty-year-old mother).

As Rick put the finishing touches on my masterpiece, I admired the detail in the mirror.

Well done Michelangelo.

On the way back to my car, I began thinking about my next tattoo. The question was, what kind of tattoo would complement Mickey Mouse?

Until next time, M-I-C...K-E-Y...M-A-C-H-O! In other words, just humor me.

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Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE is a speaker, humorist, and author of four books including Do it Well. Make it Fun. The Key to Success in Life, Death, and Almost Everything in Between. His mission is to change the workplace culture so that organizations are more productive and staff are more content. He shows people how to have more FUN while preserving the integrity of the work they do and the lives they lead. For more information, visit www.RonCulberson.com.